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### **Feminine Negotiations with Patriarchy: Bapsi Sidhwa's *The Pakistani Bride***

#### **Abstract**

This paper titled "Feminine Negotiations with Patriarchy: Bapsi Sidhwa's *The Pakistani Bride*" is an argument as advanced by Bapsi Sidhwa in the select novel. I wish to push forward the fact that the disparity in gender differences brings out the concept of negotiations in the novel. Sidhwa uses her perceptions of the society as a strategical resistance against definitions and roles created by patriarchy. In this account, I shift the point of focus to

specifically individual women whose subjectivist experience betrays the masculine ethics. Sidhwa manages to get rid of the male paradigm with the help of one of the characters named Zaitoon. Zaitoon is young. At the age of eleven, she is removed from the academic campus and caged in a domestic ambience. She grows up in an environment where she is supposed to cook, sew, shop and maintain tidiness at home. Zaitoon is presented in the article as manifestation of subjugation. She is a victim of myth. The events that follow in the novel are specific illustrations of her state of existence. Zaitoon survives and her survival in the novel can be figuratively extended as a winning over of the male hegemony.

Key words: Feminism, gender difference, myth, negotiations, oppression, patriarchy, subjugation

Bapsi Sidhwa's *The Pakistani Bride* was published in the year 1983. The novelist is an immigrant in the USA and whose parentage is constituted by a cultural hybridity. She is a Parsi Pakistan National. Her citizenship in Pakistan has eventuated in her moving away from the country to USA. Her experiences in the USA have widened her spectrum of analysis towards achieving a multi cultural perception of the feminine. In *The Pakistani Bride* Zaitoon's parentage is not a stabilized one. An orphan herself she has been brought up by Qasim, who is a tribal. He brings her up. Both Qasim and Zaitoon are partners in distress. Qasim has lost his family to a sweeping epidemic. Zaitoon has lost her parents during the Partition riots. At the refugee camp at Badami Bagh, Qasim consoles Zaitoon and makes her accept him as her father as he says,

'I think your people are dead ... you saw what happened last night ... I am your father, your new father. You are my little Zaitoon bibi ... aren't you?'  
The girl gravely regarded the strange, fair – skinned face and slanting eyes.  
'You want to be my father?' she asked solemnly. 'Yes,' he said, pulling her face to his cheeks. She twisted her neck to learn each new facet of his features. (33)

Both are victims of the postcoloniality. Being a tribal himself, Qasim cannot expand his understanding of the society. Again he is not in a position to understand Zaitoon who belongs to the opposite gender. Eventually, he cannot understand Zaitoon's construction of self.. According to Nancy Hartsock, "The female construction of self in relation to others leads... toward opposition to dualisms of any sort, [the] valuation of concrete, everyday life, [and the] sense of a variety of connectedness and continuities both with other persons and with the natural world" (298).

Miriam is Nikka's wife who actually takes care of Zaitoon. Nikka and Qasim are great friends. Zaitoon is forced into a marital despair. Miriam is another woman in the novel who resists the masculine pattern of women's marriage at an early age. Zaitoon marries Zakhi who is of the same tribe. Zaitoon develops a state of anxiety and fear after marriage. The tribals suffer poverty and Zaitoon cries to her father, "I don't want to marry. Look how poorly they live; how they eat! Dirty maize bread and water! My stomach hurts" (157). Also she is not able to incorporate herself to the demands of patriarchy. Consequently, marital disharmony emerges between Sakhi and Zaitoon. In the opinion of Wendy Williams:

When a woman married [as of 1803], her legal identity merged into that of her husband; she was civilly dead. She couldn't sue, be sued, enter into contracts, make wills, keep her own earnings, control her own property. She could not even protect her own physical integrity – her husband had the right to chastise her (although only with a switch no bigger than his thumb), restrain her freedom, and impose sexual intercourse upon her against her will. (72)

Sakhi is the bridegroom. He is proud and suffers from false prestige. He is brutal, violent and yet inefficient to deal with the intrusions of the masculine anarchy in the family. For instance Yunus Khan, who is Sakhi's brother, hurts privacy by passing on sarcastic remarks

on his brother. He always insists on his brother keeping his wife in perfect control even at the cost of extreme violence. Both of them fail to grasp the extreme complexity attached to women. According to Judith Butler,

Gender is a complexity whose totality is permanently deferred, never fully what it is at any given juncture in time. An open coalition, then, will affirm identities that are alternately instituted and relinquished according to the purposes at hand; it will be an open assemblage that permits of multiple convergences and divergences without obedience to a normative *telos* of definitional closure. (16)

Sakhi is instigated into brutally attacking his own mother Hamida and also Zaitoon. With fury, Sakhi strikes her on her thighs and shouts, “You are my woman! I’ll teach you to obey me!”(172). Both Zaitoon and Zakhi’s mother Hamida are victims of the feminine subjugation. They are yoked together in humble submission to the reigns of the masculine hegemony. Both suffer in silence. Both suffer throughout life. Sakhi is the active subject and Zaitoon is the passive subject. Consequently, she along with Hamida, has been pushed into the object status. Here Simone Beauvoir’s statement warrants mention. She writes, “*he* is the subject and *she* is the object” (qtd. in N. Krishnaswamy and R. V. Ram 81).

Sakhi mounts his tyrannical male pressure with the weapon of suspicion. As a result he indulges in a violent treatment of his wife which eventually makes her run out of home. Zaitoon is well aware of the code of ethics constituted by the tribe. As per the code, a runaway woman is sentenced to death. To escape such cruelty Zaitoon disappears into nowhere. The novel projects Zaitoon as a woman victim who is on a constant run for survival. This is how the novelist advances Sakhi’s violence as he,

... slapped her hard, and swinging her pitilessly by the arm, as a child swings a doll, he flung her from him. A sharp flint cut into her breast, and in a wild lunge

she blindly butted her head between the man's legs. In the brief scuffle ... He aimed a swift kick between her legs, and she fell back. Sakhi kicked her again and again and pain stabbed through her... That night she resolved to run away. (186)

In fact Zaitoon traverses the hostile mountainous stretch in order to sustain her life. After a brief interval, she is pulled back. The army men rescue her and see to it that she is set of free.

*The Pakistani Bride* is an illustration of the feminine subjugation. Zaitoon is a victim of sadomasochism. She is beaten recklessly by Sakhi. She is constantly insulted, hurt and humiliated by Yunus Khan. Hence the hurt, physical and psychological make Zaitoon a victim of male hegemony. Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle give their opinion about the relationship of husband and wife as follows: "... a woman is subordinate to her husband and she cannot expect to be taken seriously" (179). Sidhwa attaches a subplot to a marital relationship constituted by Carol, an American and Farukh, a Pakistani. This is one manifestation of the postcolonial paradigm. Carol too is a victim. The suspicious nature of her husband, consequently thrusts her into an extra marital intimacy with a Pakistani Army Major. The Army Major, who is already married, gives up Carol consequently reducing her to a commodity status. Major refuses to marry Carol as he says:

You don't understand at all. In spite of what you hear about our being able to have four wives, we take marriage and divorce very seriously. It involves more than just emotions. It's a social responsibility ... For one thing, at the very least, my wife's life would become unbearably confined, drab and unhappy. And we're cousins, you know. Our families would make my life – and yours – miserable. We'd be ostracized. (181)

This novel points to a crucial issue emerging from the feminist ambience. Sidhwa attempts to counter the cultural issue of feminine subjugation enacted by the postcolonial patriarchy. Specifically, Zaitoon's runaway status is a metaphorical culmination of a woman on a constant quest for identity in life. Her run is an obvious move towards reaching the more overwhelming state of existence. Zaitoon can also be taken as a challenging woman, who attempts to manipulate the oppressive masculine domain. Similarly Carol's reaction to the issue of suspicion is obviously a response to the issue of oppression which has meritoriously encompassed women's life. Zaitoon is an insider and Carol is an outsider. Both of them are tools in the hands of Sidhwa, who negotiates the masculine stratagem of oppression from within and without.

Sidhwa asserts the point that the society is primarily under the patriarchal control. The male hegemony builds up and legitimizes male supremacy, which is the perceptual order that illustrates the cultural demonstrations of the dominant group. A woman is punished and the male is not even questioned. This is obviously the inherent patriarchal paradigm encoded, and transmitted through various cultural configurations. According to Susan Bordo:

Through the pursuit of an ever- changing, homogenizing, elusive ideal of femininity- a pursuit without a terminus, requiring that women constantly attend to minute and often whimsical changes in fashion – female bodies become docile bodies – bodies whose forces and energies are habituated to external regulation, subjection, transformation, “improvement”. (91)

Zaitoon, Carol and even Miriam as well have internalized the male reality and try to release from this cage. Again Zaitoon and Carol attempt to decentre the mythical stereotype. They try to invigorate in themselves a journey strategy it is literally or even figuratively beyond the borders of patriarchy.

Bapsi Sidhwa is a unique writer and thinker who makes specific challenges to the issue of women subjugation in *The Pakistani Bride*. She is of the firm opinion that the conventional femininity can never encounter subordination. Marginalization is also a crucial component in Sidhwa's fiction. The mountainous stretch, as the backdrop to the tribals, serves as a figural representation of women getting marginalized in families. In Zaitoon, there is subordination and marginalization. Sidhwa shows how the various strategies evolved by women establish a participational role in the struggle for identity. The escapades executed by Zaitoon and Carol may be taken as the feminist strategies to invade the male ambience. They attempt to revision the man woman divide. Also they endeavour to build up a new meaning of woman. Though they are largely under represented, they represent womanhood importantly. In fact, *The Pakistani Bride* is an epistemological demonstration of the postcolonial cultural configuration.



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